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Samuel Beckett : Drama as philosophical endgame ?

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"From Inner to Outer Shadow": Reading the Obscure Object of Anxiety in the "Dramaticules" of Samuel Beckett

Arka Chattopadhyay

The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what *Angst* is about.

Angst 'does not know' what it is about which it is anxious... It is so near that it is
oppressive and stifles one's breath—and yet it is nowhere (Heidegger 1996, 186).

- 1 Be it Molloy's line "To restore silence is the role of objects" (Beckett 2006, 09) or Beckett's famous quip about his last stage-work *What Where*: "I don't know what it means. Don't ask me what it means. It's an object" (Gussow 1996, 42) or better still, the infinite inventories of little objects in *Watt* and *The Trilogy*, "object" is almost a privileged term in Beckett's works. What makes the term privileged is the position of the "object" precisely on the line which distinguishes presence from absence and inside from outside. From as early as *Waiting for Godot*, the presence-absence binary and its deconstruction have been central to commentaries on his theatre. To re-phrase a fundamental philosophical question in this context is to ask: why is there some-thing instead of no-thing on Beckett's stage? The existentialist notion of nothingness has been the prevalent critical grid to tackle these issues in Beckett's theatre. But, the question I would like to pose in this article is precisely the opposite: does Beckett's theatre at all show nothingness? I would argue that it is precisely the impossibility of this nothingness that Beckett is concerned with in his works in general and especially in his theatrical works. In the theatrical medium, this trace of presence in the form of an obscure, unreadable and enigmatic object located at the edge of absence, resisting the absolute void, assumes a new dimension in the performance. As I hope to show here, Beckett seems to theatrically ground this obscure object principally through his onstage-offstage dialectic. There cannot be absolute nothingness in theatre. To show nothing on stage, one has to turn it into something. But in Beckett, the obscure object is not some-thing which would be used as a way of showing no-thing. Instead, the

object has a spectral presence of something which annuls the supposition of nothing by virtue of its being located in the nothing itself. Beckett's theatre appropriates this abstract philosophical problem at the level of the medium and translates it into a practical philosophy of performance.

- 2 In *Breath*, a play which lasts for 35 seconds in Beckett's stage directions (Beckett 2003, 371), there are many things scattered on the stage and a recorded "vagitus" and breath off it. In a play like this, which apparently depicts the nothingness of human existence in as little as 35 seconds, Beckett loads the stage with a strictly horizontal rubbish-heap ["No verticals" in his instructions] (Beckett 2003, 371). The stage-image of the waste and its auditory counterpart offstage constitute the obscure object in *Breath*. This trace of an object is the remainder of presence in absence. The liminal and fading nature of the trace is further highlighted by Beckett's prescribed lighting where the faint light increases and decreases systematically with the breath and the cry.

- 3 Commenting on Beckett's works in *Acts of Literature*, Jacques Derrida talks about "this remainder which remains when the thematics is exhausted" (Derrida 1992, 61). Derrida seems to pitch this remainder on a structural level, pitting it against the exhaustion of thematics. It is also crucial to note that he relates this remainder in Beckett with a certain kind of "nihilism" which is both interior to and in the beyond of "metaphysics" (Derrida 1992, 61). This is what prompts the powerful contradiction—"He (Beckett) is nihilist and he is not nihilist" (Derrida 1992, 61). It is not the bland aura of an unproblematic affirmation which has the power to counter nihilism. Nihilism can only be countered through nihilism itself. Beckett's systematic impoverishment uncovers the impossibility of nothingness. In his own words, it is like saying "the no against the nothingness" (Gontarski 1992, xiii). The question organizes itself around that which remains in Beckett—the "unnullable least" (Beckett 1989, 118) of *Worstward Ho* which resists the totalization of annulment. This faded and obscured trace of a real object beyond the immediate mise-en-scene operates like an interstice between presence and absence. Though Beckett's art approaches this inassimilable remainder in all the genres he writes in, I would argue, it is the spatial dynamic of theatrical representation, which suits this most perfectly.

- 4 The quest for the obscure object is enabled by Beckett's bold encounter with the limits of theatrical representation and his ability to push the nihilistic topos to its point of self-collapse. I would relate this to the way the psychoanalytic thought of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan has grappled with this obscure disembodied object in its conceptualization of "anxiety". Heidegger's line from *Being and Time*, which I have used as an epigraph to this article, marks the same tension between "nowhere" and "everywhere" as the locus of the object of "angst", as distinct from "fear". Beckett's late-works in theatre explore this immanent object in relation to a condition of anxiety which not only shapes human experience in between the object and the objectless but accentuates the same problematic at the core of theatrical experience. As Alain Badiou observes, to continue not only when it is possible but also when it is impossible to continue is the imperative of all art (Badiou 2006). Anxiety is no mere despair. It only contributes to this impossible continuity.

- 5 In Simon Critchley's succinct summary, Heidegger's point is that "[i]f fear is fearful of something in particular and determinate, then anxiety is anxious about nothing in particular and is indeterminate" (Critchley 2009). But the crucial detail is that it is "being-in-the world" that causes anxiety in the form of an ontological attunement and

thus the "nowhere" and "nothing" of anxiety is also an "everywhere" and an "everything". In Lecture XXV (entitled 'Anxiety') of 'General Theory of The Neuroses', Freud states—"I think 'Angst' relates to the state and disregards the object, while 'Frucht' (fear) draws attention precisely to the object" (Freud 2001, 395). As opposed to "realistic anxiety" which definitely has an object, Freud considers "neurotic anxiety" to be objectless. It is anxiety in the face of void. From an early theory of anxiety as excessive and unsatisfied libidinal energy, Freud kept returning to the question of anxiety, throughout his career. To him, anxiety was a "nodal point" (Freud 2001, 393) of psychoanalysis.

- 6 From the Otto Rankian theory of anxiety as a "reproduction of the trauma of birth" (Freud 2001, 133), the separation from the mother and castration to "the return of the repressed" causing the "uncanny"—there are multiple paradigms of a Freudian theory of anxiety and important revisions such as Freud's reformulation of the causal relation between repression and anxiety. In his final and definitive text on anxiety, 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety', Freud says—"It was anxiety which produced repression and not, as I formerly believed, repression which produced anxiety" (Freud 2001, 109). In the same essay, Freud makes the absolutely crucial statement that the "ego is the actual seat of anxiety" (Freud 2001, 140) but then he also says that often the processes causing the ego-anxiety get going in the id only. The contribution of the id to the process of anxiety-generation is an important nuance in Freud since it looks forward to Lacan's focalization of the Real in redefining anxiety. The order of the Real, in Lacan's conceptualization, goes beyond the Imaginary trappings of the ego. If the id is closer to the true locus of the unconscious than the ego or the super-ego in Freud's topology, in Lacan's [especially in his later-teachings], the Real, despite all its impossibility, is closer to the true unconscious than the Imaginary or the Symbolic order.
- 7 In Seminar 10 'L'angoisse' ['Anxiety'] delivered in the years 1962-63, Lacan seizes on Freud's sentence in the 'Addenda' to 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety'—"[...] it is anxiety about something. It has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object" (Freud 2001, 165). He reads this sentence in a different way so as to observe that there is indeed an object of anxiety. It is anxiety about a lacking object or what Lacan calls "object a". In his contradictory figuration, anxiety dawns "when the lack is lacking" (Lacan 1962-63, III-12). Anxiety is the lack of a lack and its object is a part-object, not fully symbolized. In the sixth session of the seminar, Lacan says that the special object of anxiety is related to "the grill of the cut, the furrow, of the unary trait" (Lacan 1962-3, VI-6). Here, he seems to allude to the notion of the "signifying cut" (Lacan 2002, 709). It is a cut of language that divides the subject while locating him in language and alienates "das Ding" or what Lacan also calls "l'a-chose" or "the a-thing". With the foundation of the human subject in language, the Real [where "das Ding" or the thing is located] is lost forever and what the subject gains is the Symbolic register of language. So, at the heart of language is this pure loss—"[...] the dumb reality which is das Ding" (Lacan 1997, 55). All subjects are thus barred subjects in the sense that they are barred by the cut of language. In Lacan's definition, a signifier represents the subject for another signifier (Lacan 2002, 708).
- 8 The Real, in Lacan, is this impossible beyond of language. It is the thingness of the thing or the objectality of the object. It can never be expressed through language. The 'object a' in the Lacanian schema, is located at the point of intersection of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic and thus partakes of all three. In the sixth session of

Seminar 10, Lacan also calls anxiety that very cut which renders thinkable "the presence of the signifier, its functioning, its entry, its furrow in the real" (Lacan 1962-3, VI-7). The furrow of the signifier in the Real relates back to the pre-subjective constitution of "das Ding" by the "caput mortuum" of the signifier in the Real order (Lacan 2002, 43). This constitution can only be a logical presupposition since there is no subjective record of this original ontological experience. One has to presuppose this from the lifelong repetitions of symbolic constitution. There is something that happens in the always already existing order of the Real by way of a rupture. Then the dead letters, always already there in the Real, come to constitute or brace the hole created by the rupture. This symbolic constitution of the lack *preserves* it. To make use of Lacan's own example, when a potter makes a pot, he *preserves* the hole or the lack in the pot by constructing the rim around it.

- 9 At the end of Seminar 22, titled RSI, Lacan calls anxiety "the naming of the Real" (Lacan 1974-5, 72). All speech and writing, in his thought, is a repetitive and compulsive act of constituting the hole through which signifiers originate. However, it is also an act of inevitable failure since all of the Real can never be symbolized or named. Alain Badiou, in his book *Theory of the Subject*, evokes an economy of the Real while dealing with the Lacanian concept of anxiety: "Now as far as anxiety is concerned, it is from the point of view of the real in excess" (Badiou 2009, 146). He continues:

Anxiety is the submersion by the real, the radical excess of the real over the lack, the active failure of the whole apparatus of symbolic support provoked by what reveals itself therein, in a cut, as unnameable encounter (Badiou 2009, 146).

- 10 What is important in Badiou's analysis of Lacanian anxiety is the prescription of economizing the Real and thus trying to avoid both extremes—too much of the Real and too little of the Real. The Beckettian process of subtraction is imbued with courage, in Badiou's sense of the term. This courageous labour of minimalism aims at making the encounter with the Real, economical and bearable.
- 11 In the tenth session of Seminar 10, Lacan clarifies—"[...] there is no lack in the real; the lack is only graspable through the mediation of the symbolic" (Lacan 1962-3, X-2). This mediation takes place through constitution. It is when this constitution fails and the signifiers cannot "presentify what is not there" (Lacan 1962-3, X-2), that the lack itself becomes lacking. It is at this point that the Real is glimpsed through the lacking object a. The lacking lack of anxiety is thus not "an absence which the symbol can make up for" (Lacan 1962-3, X-5). Freud seems to anticipate this Real of anxiety in "The 'Uncanny'" when he says that anxiety can be caused when "a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes" (Freud 2003, 43) or in other words when there is no distinction between the symbol and the thing or in still more radical terms, when the symbol becomes the thing.
- 12 I would argue that in Beckett's later plays, he is concerned with the glimpsing of this Real of performance i.e. performance on the edge. The real object of anxiety is always an elsewhere and the ethic of admission drives his characters to express this paradoxical object of anxiety which is there and not there at the same time. The Real absence and the insistently overdetermined Symbolic presence of Godot is only an anticipation of things to come. In the later plays, the import of the offstage and the darkened and absentified areas of the stage in Beckett's minimalist lighting hold on to the interstitial point. His figures keep pushing the limits of the Symbolic, peeping into the Real. The stage-image keeps backtracking onto the void of the offstage. But the

reinforcement comes in a loaded offstage through auditory transmissions of recorded voices, tantalizing objects and tools that control the stage spectacle.

- 13 In the Prologue to his book *The Psycho-Analytic Reading of Tragedy*, André Green identifies the edge of the stage with the edge of representation. The edge of the stage is where the spectator's look has to stop and reflect itself back on to the onlooker himself. This returning gaze from the edge of the stage observes the spectator. It is a Lacanian notion of the gaze where the look of the subject is returned by the gaze of the object. Green says that this gaze is an invitation to transgress the edge of the stage "through its link with the invisible space off-stage" (Green 1994, 43). He adds—"The space off-stage frames this 'blank' of the stage on which the action is inscribed" (Green 1994, 22). The role of the off-stage space is vital in the "Dramaticules" of Beckett. It is the offstage which inscribes the obscure object of anxiety, neither here nor there or both nowhere and everywhere, as Heidegger would say.
- 14 From Alain Robbe-Grillet's early essay "Presence in Theatre" to Shimon Levy's article "The Poetics of Offstage", the offstage has been a talking point in Beckett-criticism. But both Robbe-Grillet and Levy tend to relate the offstage to absolute nothingness or non-being. Levy is correct in saying that in the "Dramaticules", the offstage takes over and starts to suck in that which is on stage, but he misses the subtler point when he says—"Eventually all will be pulled into offstage" (Levy 2002, 60). This is precisely what does not happen and will never happen. This may surely be a logical possibility but it always remains unrealized in Beckett. There is always something in the offstage, either the verbal supposition of the child outside in *Endgame* or the offstage voices in the later-plays like *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*. The offstage does loom large over the stage-entities, but a trace like the Mouth in *Not I* or the face in *That Time* will always remain. The anxiety of the figure on stage is caused by something in the offstage. In the later-plays, Beckett often splits the speaking subject and the speaking voice over the stage and the offstage-space. It is their unity as one split being that gives the stage-offstage dialectic its driving force. The speaker and the voice and the stage and the offstage form a Beckettian "pseudo-couple" (Uhlmann 2006, 51); they are both different and the same. They form the obscure object together. In a very Lacanian way, the subject is related to the object by way of an internal exclusion. They are internally excluded from each other. The stage-offstage dialectic is charged with this internal exclusion. That is why one cannot replace the other and all cannot be pulled into the offstage. The tape-recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape* is one such obscure object, both inside and outside, both on the stage and off it. Though it is a stage-prop, the voice it generates, belongs to the offstage. It is the voice of an-other Krapp in an-other time and place.
- 15 In many of the later plays, Beckett creates an alterity between the spoken text and the stage-image. The characters do not speak and an offstage-voice tells their story in the third person. Is the woman spoken of by V in *Rockaby* W herself? The situation of the third person "she" in the spoken text corresponds perfectly with the situation of W on stage but the voice does not say "I". In *Ohio Impromptu*, the content of the "Reader's" narration would suggest that he is talking about himself and the Listener but once again, the first person identification seems to be prohibited. *A Piece of Monologue* has the same pattern of a detoured speech where the self speaks about itself as of an other and that too in a voice, which is split from the subject on stage. It is crucial to note that in the first draft, the opening line of this monologue was—"My birth was my death"

- (Knowlson 1996, 572) which ultimately became "Birth was the death of him" (Beckett 2003, 425).
- 16 There is a double-bind of jubilation and aggressiveness that marks the characters' attitude towards the obscure object. In *Rockaby*, W keeps saying an anxious "more" as soon as the offstage-voice stops. Krapp keeps listening to his recorded voice from the tape despite his disgruntlement with it. There are occasions when he just cannot tolerate it and switches off but soon afterwards turns it on again. The object of anxiety is also the object of desire because it blocks the passage to the absolute nothing. Voice B says in *That Time*—"[...] just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud" (Beckett 2003, 390). Signifiers attempt to constitute the lack and yet the lack glimpses through the intermittent failures of the signifier's mediation. This is the unconstituted and lacking lack. When words fail, the lack also fails to appear and the Real is encountered in all its ungraspability.
 - 17 The Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* says—"Words are few. Dying too" (Beckett 2003, 425). Death is a perpetual unknown as it does not allow the consciousness to grasp it. The consciousness can only reach and symbolize the final frontier before collapsing into death. The inscription of death within birth has to do with the eschewal of the Real self at the moment of the subject's birth into language due to the "signifying cut". The signifiers insist on this eschewal throughout subjective existence. With the onset of death, this excluded Real is at stake. But, there are always words, however few they may be. The pure Real belongs to an unknowable post-cognitive realm of death. Anxiety always finds the obscure object at the edge of non-being to repress non-being. This is the problematic of death-anxiety in the play. Words are dying and still there is the vehement admission—"No such thing as none" (Beckett 2003, 426). The entire text dwells on the gap among the words "going", "gone" and "begone" (Beckett 2003, 429). Theatre cannot represent the "gone" or the "begone" of death. What it can show is only the process of "going". The speech-act itself becomes a remainder in the play. And throughout this act, the Speaker is desperate to identify traces at the edge of the void. He faces the blank wall, once studded with the pictures of his loved ones. The pictures are not there anymore. But the drawing-pins with which they were fixed are still there on the wall. They are the traces which help him remember the pictures. In this obscure object, once again, there is the combination of the drawing-pins on stage and the pictures off it.
 - 18 The fading presence of the obscure object is brilliantly underscored when the question about the object ("what") and its locus ("where") in *What Where* becomes the answer itself. That is to say the "what" becomes the object and the "where" its locus. When Bam instructs Bim to "give him the works" until he confesses "that he said it to him" (Beckett 2003, 473), it is this "it" which marks the nature of the object of anxiety, almost echoing the "it speaks" of the unconscious in psychoanalytic thought. A little later, when Bam tells Bim—"It's a lie. [Pause.] He said where to you. [Pause.] Confess he said where to you" (Beckett 2003, 475), once again, it is the signifier "where" which becomes the sole spatial marker for the what-object. Interestingly enough, the trial always takes place offstage. That is where the real truth of the "what" and the "where" is dis-concealed.
 - 19 In the two mimes, Beckett wrote for the theatre, *Act Without Words I* and *II*, the offstage both vertically and horizontally controls the stage-spectacle. In *Act Without Words I*, a man constantly tries to rush out of the stage but each time, he is "flung back" (Beckett

2003, 203) from the wings. This is the horizontal axis of the offstage at work. The vertical axis is charged with the tantalizing objects (a tree with its cooling shade, a tiny carafe with the label 'Water' etc), coming down in the desert-scene. They all rest suspended in the air, just above the reach of the man. Cubes descend too, in order to facilitate his ascent but each time he tries to make use of these objects, they are withdrawn with an offstage-whistle, which had also marked their appearance. After the repeatedly futile attempts, the man renounces the lure at the end and sits unmoved. The anxiety of the man is caused by the offstage, where he wants to go initially and when relief-objects arrive from offstage, they always arrive only to depart. His renunciation of these alluring objects at the end is a renunciation of the desire to go off. This is why all can never be pulled into the recesses of non-being. The offstage will keep the stage alive. It will continue to govern the stage spectacle. Like the "strictly horizontal goad" (Beckett 2003, 209) that pokes the two players out of their sacks in *Act Without Words II*, the obscure object will provoke the stage into action from the edge. This is a mutually sustaining and endless relation between presence and absence, fixed on the object in between. Although the man in *Act Without Words I* apparently renounces the objects at the end, his gesture of looking at his hands (that is the final line of Beckett's text) is a remainder of his desire for them. In this to-and-fro of desire is enacted the subjective attitude to the obscure object. The partial renunciation does not put an absolute end to the process. As in *Act Without Words II*, everything may start all over again in an endlessly repetitious circularity. The goad keeps darting at the two sacks and A and B keep crawling out to perform their trifles. After the first poke of the goad, the position of the sacks had changed (from BA to AB) but the second poke restores the original position with a neutralizing turn (from AB to BA). The play ends with the third poke, suggesting infinite circularity.

- 20 Thus, in these two mimes, the movement is originated at the level of the offstage and brings the stage into action. Here, the obscure objects govern the spectacle, very much like the "ex-sistence" or "ek-sistence" of the Real in Lacan. In Lacan's terms, the Real is the third element after the Symbolic and the Imaginary and it always "ek-sists" or "ex-sists" in the sense that it pushes the structure from outside. In the tenth session of Seminar 21, titled, 'The Non-Dupes Err' ['The Names of the Father'] (1973-74), Lacan says—"If something ek-sists with respect to something, it is very precisely because of not being coupled to it, of being thirded (*troisième*), if you will allow me this neologism" (Lacan 1973-4, X-10). Be it the offstage-objects or the goad, the "ex-sistence" of the Real pushes the stage-action from the edge and the subject is enmeshed in the dialectic of its naming. As we have seen, the subjects in both the plays try, fail, renounce, still desire the attempts and go on trying in a bid to economize the effect of this encounter with the Real. Their anxiety is thus not just a negative response, but a defense as well as a drive to go on.
- 21 In *Come and Go*, *Not I* and *That Time*, Beckett narrows down the stage space to its bare bones, further differentiating between the offstage and the dark zones of the stage, excluded from performance. As the stage-directions in *Come and Go* indicate, Vi, Flo and Ru exit one after the other not into the offstage but into the dark zones of the stage. The moment one disappears, the other two murmur a truth about the absent one. The truth causes anxiety and it is communicated through their appalled facial expressions and articulations. The audience never gets to know the anxiety-evoking truth but it is not even the void. The materiality of the signifier is embedded in the reaction of the listener—three very different "oh!" sounds on the three occasions (Beckett 2003, 357).

The inaudibility of the murmur problematizes it. It is spoken on the stage but maintains a link with the offstage in so far as it is inaudible. In these dark and "unperformed" zones of the stage, something of the Real may exist. These dark zones stand internally excluded.

- 22 In *Not I*, the Mouth is the only object on stage. The Mouth, eight feet above stage level and lit up by a faint light from close-up and below, presents the purest image of lack on stage, ejecting an excremental and torrential speech. It is an embodiment of the lacking lack, which the unending flow of signifiers tries to constitute in vain. There is a split between the voice and the female speaker, accounting for the movement from "I" to "not-I". Once again, the first-person pronoun "I" remains strictly prohibited—"[...] what?...who?...no!...she!...SHE!" (Beckett 2003, 382). It is like an endless buzzing in her mind. She desperately wants to stop but something keeps stirring, keeps moving in her poor mind. Her desire to end the torrential flow of signifiers produces the anxious babble. This desire draws her closer and closer to the supposed Real of nothingness. But the Real is not nothingness. It is an impossibility that makes nothingness impossible. Thus the voice can never stop. The babble continues for ten seconds after the fall of the curtain. This does not signify the absolute collapse of the stage-trace into the offstage. This is the continuation of the buzz as sound-object in an elsewhere, suggesting the final no to nothingness. Something keeps begging in her mind and this interminability is what sustains the object in a hypothetical elsewhere—"[...] nothing there... on somewhere else... try somewhere else [...]" (Beckett 2003, 382).
- 23 In *Ohio Impromptu*, a man comes every night to read to the subject, his "sad tale" all over again. The Listener, whose story is being read aloud from a book, keeps interrupting the narration by intermittently knocking on the table-top. Anxiety is figured in terms of a desire for textual interminability. With each knock, the Reader goes back a few lines until there is nothing left to tell and the knock only induces the clarification—"Nothing is left to tell" (Beckett 2003, 448). The Reader is sent by some offstage-entity and one night he comes and declares that he has been told by the sender not to come again. He names the dear name of the sender but Beckett's text omits it—"[...] I have had word from—and here he named the dear name [...]" (Beckett 2003, 447). When the Listener describes the place in the book where the "fearful symptoms" (Beckett 2003, 446) of the subject's nocturnal anxiety is recorded, he prevents the Listener from going to that page. The address of the symptom is mentioned nevertheless—"page forty paragraph four" (Beckett 2003, 448). Both the name of the dear other and the symptom of anxiety are there and not there at the same time. They are there somewhere or everywhere or perhaps nowhere. When all is done, there is always a no-thing left to tell. This leftover is the gestural unification of the Reader and the Listener, at the end of the play where "[...] simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other" (Beckett 2003, 448P) and the text reads—"[...] they grew to be as one" (Beckett 2003, 447). Are the Reader and the Listener same as the two men in the story? The correspondence between the stage-image and the narration would suggest so. But, Beckett significantly avoids all first-person references. There was a first-person passage ("I am out on leave" cited in Adam Seelig's article "Beckett's Dying Remains: The Process of Playwriting in the *Ohio Impromptu* Manuscripts") in the early dramatic fragments that finally led to this occasional piece. But Beckett decided to do away with it in the final version. It is this

text-performance split, which locates the Reader-Listener pseudocouple at the edge of the stage.

- 24 In the television-play *Quad*, the centre of the stage is called 'E'—a "danger zone" (Beckett 2003, 453). The four players in turn try and move along the margins and across the square-shaped playing area. As the number of figures increases by one, it becomes more and more difficult to avoid the centre. With proliferation of figures from the four corners of the square, the threat of collision and fall around the dangerous centre grows rapidly. And yet there is no collision, no fall either. The strictly choreographed ballet-movements of the players ensure continuous circulation. All four swirl in towards the centre which attracts them and then there is an equally precise deflecting movement, backtracking, away from the centre. This "danger zone" is another of the obscure objects, defying the stage-offstage divide. It is there on the stage alright, but it is also a point the players are desperate not to bring into play. It is an internally excluded object. It is a lack, which the players try to constitute through their circulation. In this play, they do not have the aid of words and have to depend on the Symbolic aid of the body which makes inscriptions through its movements. But this process of figural constitution passes into an eternity of repetition. Seeing *Quad*, Beckett had said that the second part of the play takes place "ten thousand years later" (Knowlson 1996, 593)). In the second part, the colours go off and the pace of the movements significantly drops so as to imply the exhaustion of infinite constitution. The whole of the Real point can never be symbolized but the process of symbolic constitution has to go on. This is a courageous continuation where we hear the final pronouncement of *The Unnamable*—"[...] you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett 2006, 407).
- 25 The "obscure object" in Beckett's theatre is thus the result of a subtractive labour on the part the artist. This aesthetic labour aims to control the symptom of excess and localize it at the edge of representation. In accordance with the psychoanalytic ethics of cure, in Beckett, it is impossible to remove the symptom of anxiety. Any attempt at a complete removal of the object may make the process susceptible to the horror of nothingness or non-being. Beckett's project, as I have tried to show in my analysis of the plays, is to preserve this object and not to dislodge it since that would open the floodgates of absolute void. As Badiou's reading of Beckett implies, the ethics of Beckettian minimalism is to admit the lack or what the playwright himself would call the chaos. This chaos can only be shaped if the artist decides not to deny or exclude it but to let it in. Only by admitting and internalizing the chaos can one begin the process of subtraction where all inessential particularities are stripped away and we reach the exact configuration of the "obscure object". Beckett had told Tom Driver in the early 60s—"[...] there will be new form, and this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (Hesla 1971, 06-07). Beckett's theatre aims at establishing a kind of control over the state of anxiety and one may see in it a trace of the classic Aristotelian function of tragic catharsis. If Aristotelian catharsis aims at a purgation of fear, Beckettian subtraction is aimed at controlling anxiety by fixing it in its lowest possible denomination—a tiny speck at the edge of the void. This entire discussion underscores Beckett's successful translation of philosophy into theatre where he is not only raising philosophical questions through theatre but relating them to the fundamental mechanism of the medium itself. Beckett's theatre is not just philosophical theatre but it is a theatricalization of

philosophy. He makes us see purely ontological and philosophical problems at the level of the literary genre and we realize that they are theatrical problems too. This is how he seems to me to be *implicating* philosophy in theatre. His theatre seizes philosophy as action and performance on stage. In Badiou's philosophical system, philosophy deals with four truth procedures as its four "conditions", (mathematics or science, art, love and politics) one of which is art (Badiou 1999, 35). According to Badiou, in different ages, philosophy has "sutured" to or exclusively engaged itself with only one of these four truth procedures (Badiou 1999, 61). In Heidegger, Badiou locates an artistic "suture" of philosophy where philosophy starts to deal with the artistic truth procedure at the cost of the other three (Badiou 1999, 66). In Beckett's appropriative, internalizing and assimilative use of philosophy in theatre, we may see a "suture" from the other side, i.e. art being sutured to philosophy instead of philosophy being sutured to art. What problematizes this "suture" from the other end is the fact that Beckett does not appropriate philosophy to art at the cost of the other truth procedures of science, politics and love. His is an aestheticization of philosophy, which displaces philosophy from its domain exterior to art and the other truth procedures and encapsulates it within the artistic locus.

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ABSTRACTS

The article aims to examine the obscure object of anxiety in the "Dramaticules" of Samuel Beckett in the context of the psychoanalytic formulations of anxiety from Sigmund Freud to Jacques Lacan, considering especially the debate regarding the presence or absence of the object of anxiety. Focusing on Beckett's dialectical interplay of stage and offstage, the article seeks to

identify the trace of the object right at the edge of theatrical representation. Beckett's courageous subtraction grounds the interstitial object in a bid to arrive at an affordable economy in this treatment of anxiety, involving a problematic encounter with the Real.

Nous nous proposons d'étudier l'obscur objet de l'angoisse dans les "Dramaticules" de Samuel Beckett, ceci dans le contexte des formulations psychanalytiques de l'angoisse, de Sigmund Freud à Jacques Lacan, en particulier le débat concernant la présence ou l'absence de l'objet de l'angoisse. Partant d'une observation de l'interaction dialectique entre la scène et le hors-scène chez Beckett, nous essaierons d'identifier la trace de l'objet au seuil de la représentation théâtrale. La soustraction courageuse de Beckett permet de fonder l'objet interstitiel afin d'aboutir à une économie viable dans le traitement de l'angoisse qui implique une rencontre problématique avec le Réel.

INDEX

Keywords: anxiety, fear, obscure object, object-a, Das Ding, real, ek-sistence, symbolic, imaginary, presence, absence, lack, stage, offstage, nothingness, remainder, subject, constitution, voice, alterity

Mots-clés: angoisse, peur, obscur objet du désir, objet a, Das Ding, réel, ex-sistence, hors-scène, présence, absence, manque, scène, néant, résidu, sujet, constitution, voix, altérité

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